

The Bulletin

Blinded Veterans Helping Blinded Veterans



Spring 2025

BVA 80TH NATIONAL CONVENTION

JULY 5-11, 2025
DALLAS, TEXAS



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Cover Photos: Downtown Dallas, Texas, site of the BVA 80th National Convention July 5-11, offers this year's BVA contingent a beautiful arts scene, urban green spaces, luxurious shopping, fine dining, vibrant nightlife, and excellence in hotel accommodations beginning with the popular Hyatt Regency Dallas. Highlights, details, and expectations relating to this historic Lone Star State gathering pack this issue of **The Bulletin**.

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Published quarterly by and for blinded veterans and sent to all blinded veterans without charge. **The Bulletin** informs BVA members about their Association and the issues that affect blind and low vision veterans.



President's Page

by Paul Mimms

As I gathered content for this issue of **The Bulletin**, we were also launching registration and details of our upcoming annual convention, July 5-11 in Dallas, Texas. The convention will feature the celebration of our 80th anniversary. As most of you probably know, via the information we've put out in our **BVA Happenings** weekly newsletter, the official date of that anniversary was March 28, but the bigger celebration together as an organization will occur in Dallas.

The convention will also signal the end of my two-year term as BVA National President. When I was elected, I sensed an urgency to begin bringing about some changes that I felt would benefit the organization and help point BVA in the right direction to fortify our future. I believe that I have met many of the goals I set for my term.

The first and most important goal was to guide BVA back to being a member-driven organization. Much of that was accomplished by:

- Returning responsibility for and within regional groups to the members.
- Increasing the transparency of the Board of Directors to the members.
- Creating virtual Town Halls and other educational opportunities for members.
- Taking the lead in making Board members more available to assist Association members along their path toward success.
- Empowering members through programs that help them develop personally.

- Creating increased opportunities for participation by greater numbers of members in pre-planned program events.
- Increasing the number of members through the elimination of dues.
- Empowering individual members utilizing third-party voting, allowing all members to vote on all issues and candidates.

In a statement of committed leadership, each member of our BVA Board of Directors donated to BVA to provide the impetus to an initiative for members to do the same. In addition, the Board of Directors has made decisions that have placed the organization in a more financially sound position with a more



Paul Mimms has delivered BVA's annual Congressional testimony on three occasions, once in 2018 as National Vice President, pictured here, and twice as National President in 2024 and 2025.

professional image in the Veterans Service Organization and nonprofit communities.

During my term of office, BVA has survived several iterations of itself and the way we have traditionally done things. We are now striving to improve and emerge stronger as members, having made the needed

adjustments to compete in an environment that demands competency among its leadership and a membership that supports and can trust that leadership. I believe that BVA is well-positioned to head into another 80 years of “blinded veterans helping blinded veterans.”



Legislative Update

by Lea Rowe

Navigating the Legislative Landscape: BVA Advocacy in Action

As the federal legislative branch moves

through a period of transition on Capitol Hill, BVA remains steadfast in its commitment to serve as an effective advocate on behalf of our members. Our recent national testimony before the Senate and House Committees on Veterans Affairs, delivered by National President Paul Mimms, underscored our dedication to ensuring equitable access and support for blinded veterans across the nation. This quarter, BVA is actively engaged in a range of legislative initiatives that address the diverse needs of the veteran community.

A key focus is the Veterans Equal Access Act (H.R. 1147), which proposes the establishment of a Veterans Advisory Committee on Equal Access. This committee would play a crucial role in advising the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) on accessibility matters, ensuring that blinded veterans have equal opportunities in all aspects of life.

Simultaneously with our advocacy of H.R. 1147, BVA is closely monitoring and supporting several bills aimed at improving veteran transportation services, particularly for those in rural areas. These initiatives include S. 827, S. 784, and efforts to extend and modify VA’s transportation grant program, as well as advocating for an increase in the mileage rate offered through the Beneficiary Travel Program (S. 599). BVA’s active participation in the ACES (Automated. Connected. Electric. Shared.) Mobility Coalition further underscores our commitment to the enhancement of mobility options for veterans with disabilities. Additionally, the organization is advocating for the passage of the Service Dogs Assisting Veterans Act (SAVES) to protect the access rights of guide dogs and service dogs.

Health care remains of paramount concern. BVA is advocating for enhanced clinical standards within VA’s caregiver program, ensuring that caregivers receive the necessary training and support to provide quality care. Furthermore, the organization is committed to safeguarding and increasing funding for VA Blind Rehabilitation Service (BRS), recognizing its essential role in veteran rehabilitation. Maintaining high standards of

ocular clinical care is also a priority, and BVA is working to ensure that blinded veterans receive the best possible eye care.

Recognizing the importance of mental health, the organization is advocating for improved mental health services, particularly for women veterans. Additionally, BVA is supporting efforts to increase funding for vision research, which is critical for developing future treatments. The Durable Medical Equipment, Prosthetics, Orthotics, and Supplies (DMEPOS) Relief Act of 2025 (H.R. 2005), reintroduced by Representative Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-IA-1), aims to provide funding relief to home medical equipment providers, ensuring continued access to essential medical supplies for veterans.

VA is also deeply committed to honoring combat-disabled veterans. The reintroduced Major Richard Star Act seeks to allow combat-disabled uniformed service retirees with fewer than 20 years of service to concurrently receive veterans' disability compensation and retired pay, or Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC). BVA is actively seeking co-sponsors for this vital legislation, emphasizing that CRSC is distinct from Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP). The Veterans SPORT Act (H.R. 1971) aims to provide VA coverage for prosthetic limbs used in sports and recreational activities, recognizing their importance in maintaining physical and mental well-being. BVA is also actively involved in the prosthetics workgroup to ensure that veterans have access to the necessary prosthetic devices.

Other key initiatives include supporting H.R. 2138, which proposes to increase disability compensation rates, advocating for the Feed Hungry Veterans Act to address food



Lea Rowe with National Vice President Wade Davis outside the Congressional hearing room prior to February 25 BVA testimony.

insecurity, working to ensure justice for Camp Lejeune victims, and actively participating in the implementation of the PACT Act. BVA is also engaged with the VA 508 Workgroup on technology accessibility, collaborating with the Friends of VA Medical Care and Health Research (FOVA), contributing to the American Foundation for the Blind AI Advisory Group, participating in the Autonomous Vehicle Coalition, and working with the Military Coalition and Independence Through Enhancement of Medicare and Medicaid (ITEM) Coalition to advance veteran legislation.

Despite the complexities and many moving pieces in the current legislative environment, we remain optimistic about the future. By maintaining a steadfast commitment to our mission, fostering strong partnerships, and amplifying the voices of our members, we are confident that we can achieve meaningful progress. We will continue to work tirelessly, driven by the hope that our efforts will create a more equitable and supportive environment for all blinded veterans, ensuring that they have the resources and opportunities they deserve in order to thrive.



Executive Director's Message

by Dr. Vernon Humphrey

Greetings to what I now consider to be my BVA Family!

It is truly an honor to take the reins from Don Overton as the next

National Executive Director of the finest Veterans Service Organization I know of. Over the past 80 years, BVA has been the leader in blind veteran advocacy.

Although we have come a long way, the road ahead is still long and challenging. I know that, together, we can and will continue to lead the way. I believe that our Executive Directors of the past have done an exceptional job but would not have been successful without the support of the membership, Board of Directors, and staff.

I have the privilege of assuming command of a well-run, forward-thinking group. Many leaders are not afforded the opportunity of working with a body of individuals who understand “mission first” and “service before self” as BVA does. During my military career, I detested it when new leadership stepped in and everything immediately changed. I found that the best way to lead is to watch, listen, and ask. I have the utmost respect and belief in our staff and key members—and in their

judgment. I will have many questions in the future and know I will always get a straight answer, not the answer they may think I want to hear.

Thank you for your belief in me. I will do my utmost not to let you down and I will always be honest with you. Please promise that you will hold my feet to the fire. If you feel you need to, please feel free to contact me at any time.



Vernon Humphrey, center, took the lead in guiding Lawrence Harrison and Paul Mimms in a procession toward the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at last November's Veterans Day VSO wreath laying. All three were assisted by guide dog Shadow at Paul's left.

Destination Dallas—Yippee Ki-Yay!

By Meredith Buono-DaGrossa

Pursuant to the provisions of Article 4, Section 3 of the National Bylaws, all members of the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) are hereby notified that the Association's 80th National Convention will be held at the Hyatt Regency Dallas, 300 Reunion Boulevard, Dallas, TX 75207, from Saturday, July 5 through Friday, July 11, 2025. BVA is partnering with the American Council of the Blind (ACB) in hosting this historic gathering.

Planning and preparation are now in full swing as members of the BVA Board of Directors, headquarters staff, and volunteers prepare for the BVA 80th National Convention at the Hyatt Regency Dallas in the great City of Dallas, Texas. Official dates for this year's gathering, carried out in partnership and conjunction with the annual convention of the American Council of the Blind (ACB), are July 5-11, 2025.

Dallas is an emerging global metropolis that proudly anchors the North Texas region, the nation's fourth largest metropolitan area. The city's own convention and visitor's bureau refers to Dallas as a diverse and vibrant destination offering a unique combination of future-facing, innovative audacity, and rich cultural heritage.

Explore your own maverick, can-do spirit in Dallas. Pack your curiosity and prepare to wander these larger-than-life streets, where you'll discover a thriving arts and culture scene, iconic sports, creative culinary experiences, and warm and welcoming

hospitality that will make you say, "Whoa!" The hidden gems of Dallas are bigger, bolder, and have just the right amount of swagger.

BVA registration, which opened in April, costs \$200 per BVA member. Auxiliary members, guests, and nonmembers will also pay the same \$200 registration fee. All registrations must be completed online at **BVA.org**. The cost includes a convention bag, a T-shirt, a cowboy hat, entrance to a joint ACB/BVA Exhibit Hall, entrance to business meetings, the Tuesday evening BVA Gala, and the Wednesday afternoon Father Carroll Luncheon. The most recent version of the scheduled events is currently at **BVA.org/national-convention**.



Perhaps the one must-visit neighborhood for BVA convention attendees, the Dallas Arts District in the northeast corner of downtown Dallas unifies culture and commerce into the largest contiguous urban arts district in the United States. Photo courtesy of **Visit Dallas**.

Registration Information

BVA members and guests can register and pay online on the aforementioned National Convention page of the BVA website. Please note that listed offsite trips and some internal events have an additional fee. Offsite trips for BVA members are available on a first-come, first-served basis and have limited availability. Alternatively, members and guests can register by calling 202-371-8880 and speaking with the National Administrative Coordinator or the National Outreach Director, or by emailing membership@BVA.org.

The deadline to register for the convention itself is June 20, 2025. Although the registration deadline is June 20, BVA National Headquarters highly encourages members to register earlier to ensure accurate counts on T-shirts, meals, etc. Due to manpower limitations, if you require special assistance of a caregiver, you will be required to make those arrangements and register them as a guest.

Hotel Information

The BVA room rate at the Hyatt Regency Dallas starts at \$99 per night (plus a 15 percent room tax and a \$2 Tourism Public Improvement District Tax). The hotel offers complimentary standard Wi-Fi in guest rooms and social spaces, refrigerators and k-cup coffee makers in each room, use of the outdoor pool, and a 24-hour fitness center.

The hotel will authorize a one-time \$50 charge for the entire stay. Each attendee will need to supply a credit or debit card for the room. The card will not be charged but authorized only for that amount. In the case of a debit card, the funds will be held by the bank until after the guest checks out if the amount in full is not used.



Located seven miles from downtown Dallas, NorthPark Center offers a quick getaway from the convention hustle and bustle with perhaps the top shopping experience of the southwestern United States. The mall consists of 200 retailers that include luxury boutiques, trend-setting clothing stores, restaurants, and movie theaters. Photo courtesy of **Visit Dallas**.

You can reserve your hotel room online at <https://www.hyatt.com/en-US/group-booking/JAXRJ/G-ACOB> or call (800) 233-1234 and use Code G-AMCB. To receive the group rate, you must register prior to June 10, 2025.

Dining options include the Coffee's Post, Centennial, Monduel's, and Parrino's. Dining to Go is also available.

Self-parking in the outdoor Radish Lot located at the intersection of Hotel Street and Reunion Boulevard West is \$30 per day. This fee includes in/out privileges for overnight guests only.

Valet Parking is available at the hotel entrance for \$50 plus tax per day. This fee includes in/out privileges and overnight stay. Hourly fee varies if not staying overnight.

WayAround will again provide accessible descriptions of the hotel at this year's BVA gathering! Scan a WaySign (located underneath ADA signs) with your iPhone or Android device to access a directory of all the spaces used by BVA at the hotel. Be sure to download the free WayAround app for iOS or Android 2 to access the descriptions. Plans with NaviLens are also underway to provide accessible descriptions of the Exhibit Hall.

Transportation to the Hotel

Please note that a shuttle will not be provided. You will be required to arrange transportation to and from the airport. When you finalize your travel plans, please send your itinerary to Margarine Beaman at oleo501625@outlook.com. As always, Margarine will assist with navigation to the best of her ability. For additional transportation options, visit the National Convention page.

Travel Information

For travel assistance, please contact Brenda K. McDaniel, Independent Travel Consultant and daughter of a BVA member, by email at brenda_mcdaniel@sbcglobal.net, or by telephone at (915) 204-0101 (between 11:00am and 6:30pm Eastern Time).

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the member cancellation policy?

Fully refundable registration cancellations will be honored through June 21, 2025, at 5:00pm Eastern Time.

How do I sign up for offsite events, tours, and activities?

Offsite tours and pricing are available on the BVA registration page. Please note that participation is on a first-come, first-served basis and is limited. Discounted prices are for BVA members only.

Will someone meet me at the airport/train station?

Volunteers may be available to assist BVA members and guests at the airport. When you finalize your travel plans, please send your itinerary to Margarine Beaman at oleo501625@outlook.com, who will be assisting with navigation with the assistance of available volunteers.



A short Uber ride at midday will take convention attendees to Victory Park, site of the Perot Museum of Nature and Science. The museum explores both modern technology and natural history—from technical innovations at Texas Instruments to prehistoric Texan wildlife. Photo courtesy of **Visit Dallas**.



Night view of the Hall of State, formally known as the State of Texas Building. The Hall of State is home to the Dallas Historical Society and holds several of the most breathtaking Art Deco designs in the world. The venue is open to the public from 10:00am-5:00pm Tuesday through Saturday and 1:00-5:00pm on Sunday. Photo courtesy of **Visit Dallas**.

Is there a shuttle from the airport to the hotel?

No. Members should plan to use an Uber or Lyft to and from the airport at their own expense. A taxi may be more expensive. There are two airports in the metro area. Dallas Fort Worth International Airport (DFW) is 23 miles from the hotel. The recommended airport is Dallas Love Field (DAL), which is five miles from the hotel. The Megabus Stop and Greyhound Station (205 Lamar Street) are both within easy travel distance of the Hyatt Regency. Amtrak comes to Dallas' Union Station (400 South Houston) and is located half a mile from the hotel. Union Station is served by the DART Light Rail's Red or Blue line. Guests can take either the Red or Blue line (\$3) from the airport to Union Station. There is an underground concourse attached to the hotel (five-minute walk).

ADA transportation is also available through paratransit services.

Do the hotel rooms have refrigerators for my medications?

Yes. All rooms are equipped with a small refrigerator.

How do I rent a wheelchair or scooter?

If you would like to rent a wheelchair or scooter, call Andrew Fulton Dallas Mobility Rentals at (214) 506-0526. Weekly scooter rentals are \$139 and wheelchairs (any size), are \$79. They will be delivered to the hotel on Thursday, July 3, and picked up on Friday, July 11th. You must call in advance to order your wheelchair or scooter. Once you have placed your order, email Janet Dickelman, ACB Convention Coordinator, at janet.dickelman@gmail.com so she can maintain a list to ensure that all wheelchairs and scooters have been received.

What dining options are available at the hotel?

The hotel has onsite restaurants with breakfast, lunch, and dinner options.

Is there a dog relief area and a way to preorder food for my guide dog?

Yes! ScoopMasters will provide and maintain our dog relief areas. If you would like to preorder dog food to be delivered to your hotel room, call Tim Stone at (661) 714-0749 or order online at <https://scoopmasters.com/acb>. Food must be ordered by June 20 to ensure delivery. Also, back by "popular" demand, the Bow Wow Lounge sponsored by Waymo will serve as a respite area for our canine heroes throughout the convention.

What is the plan in the event of a fire drill or emergency?

Volunteers and hotel staff will orient members to the emergency exits, stairwells, and assembly areas near their rooms. Any further questions can be answered at the convention.

What meals are included in my registration fee?

Tuesday: Coffee and pastries will be available during the 508 Accessibility Fireside Chat.

Tuesday: Evening dinner will be provided at the BVA Gala.

Wednesday: The Father Carroll Luncheon and Awards Ceremony will offer a midday meal.

Thursday: Offsite trip includes lunch.

Friday: Offsite trip includes dinner.

What if I have additional questions?

If you have any additional questions or comments, please contact your District Director, the National Outreach Director, the National Membership Coordinator, or email membership@BVA.org. We are excited to celebrate with y'all in Dallas.

Important Dates and Deadlines

- May 6: Proposed bylaw amendments must be received by BVA National Headquarters. Amendments should be emailed to membership@bva.org.
- May 21: Proposed bylaw amendments will be posted at **BVA.org**, in **BVA Happenings**, and via BVA's social media platforms
- May 30: Deadline for submitting names to both Rules and Bylaws Committees.
- June 2: Commencement of electronic voting with Vote-Now.
- June 10: Final date to reserve a room at the

Hyatt Regency Dallas using the group code.

- June 27: Virtual rules and credentials meeting
- July 2: Last day for paper ballots to be received and accepted by Vote-Now.
- July 9: Vote-Now election closes at 3:00pm Eastern Time.
- July 11: Election results announced in person by BVA National President at convention.

Second Chance for Sight to Support Convention Offsite Activities

The significance of the word "milestone" cannot be emphasized enough when it comes to BVA's official 80th birthday and the upcoming national convention. Registration is now open, and excitement continues to build. The camaraderie to be felt among attendees during offsite trips to the 6th Street Museum, AT&T Stadium, and Circle R Ranch will be well worth the purchase price and effort to participate.

BVA extends a special thank you to the Second Chance for Sight Foundation and the Sindoni family for their generous donation to help keep these events an affordable option for our blind and low vision veterans. More information is available on the National Convention webpage.

BVA 80th National Convention



Hyatt Regency Dallas

Tentative Schedule of Events as of May 19

July 5-11, 2025

BVA Services Available throughout Convention Week

1. Waymo Bow Wow Lounge, Monday-Friday, 9:00am-5:00pm, Room To Be Announced
2. Nurses's Office, Monday-Friday, Time and Room To Be Announced
3. Veterans Service Program Claims Office, Sunday-Thursday, 9:00am-4:00pm;
Friday, 9:00am-1:00pm; Baker Room every day

Saturday, July 5	Agenda	Room
7:00pm-9:00pm	ACB Opening Ceremony	Reunion, Lobby Level
Sunday, July 6	Agenda	Room
9:00am-5:00pm	Exhibit Hall Open	Landmark Ballroom, Lobby Level
9:00am-5:00pm	BVA Registration	Pegasus, Lobby Level
10:00am-11:00am	BVA Orientation	Landmark D, Lobby Level
11:15am-1:15pm	Sound Bowl Session Holistic Healing & Relaxation/Dallas VA Rec Therapy Robert Hampton & Amor Aguilera	Cumberland K&L, Exhibition Level
3:00pm-5:00pm	Emerging Technologies/Navigation Seminar Meta, NaviLens, WayAround, WeWalk, Biped	Gaston A, Atrium Level
Monday, July 7	Agenda	Room
8:00am-9:00am	BVA Opening Ceremony	Cumberland K&L, Exhibition Level
8:00am-9:00am	BVA Registration	Pegasus, Lobby Level
9:00am-12:00pm	Opening Business Meeting/National Staff Reports	Cumberland K&L, Exhibition Level
9:00am-11:30am	BVA Auxiliary Opening Business Meeting	Aerial Queen, 3rd Level
11:00am-5:00pm	Exhibit Hall Open	Landmark Ballroom, Lobby Level
12:15pm-4:00pm	Offsite Trip/ 6th Floor Museum	Meet in Landmark D, Lobby Level
1:00pm-3:00pm	District Caucus Meetings/District Directors	Cumberland FGH, District 1, Exhibition Level Landmark D, District 2, Atrium Level Cumberland E, District 3 Cumberland J, District 4 Exhibition Level

4:15pm-5:15pm	Learn about Team BVA Interest Groups (Adaptive Sports, Book Club, and Dog Handler)	Cumberland K&L, Exhibition Level
6:30pm-9:30pm	Hospitality Suite Hosted by Greater Houston Regional Group	Presidential Suite, To Be Determined
Tuesday, July 8	Agenda	Room
7:00am-8:00am	Dog Walk	To Be Determined
8:30am-10:00am	Fireside Chat/508 Compliance Accessing VA Systems (coffee/pastries served) Moderated by Matt Ater, Senior Vice President of Business Development, Vispero	Cumberland K&L, Exhibition Level
9:00am-5:00pm	BVA Auxiliary New Business & Adjournment	Aerial Queen, 3rd Level
10:30am-12:00pm	Town Hall/ Department of Veterans Affairs Blind Rehabilitation & Prosthetic Services Niki Sandlan, National Program Director	Cumberland K&L, Exhibition Level
11:00am-5:00pm	Exhibit Hall Open	Landmark Ballroom, Lobby Level
1:00pm-2:30pm	Learn BVA (Veterans Service Program Ambassador Program, & Development)	Cumberland K&L, Exhibition Level
2:45pm-4:15pm	Music Therapy Ruth Hook, MT-BC, MBA Music Therapist, North Texas VAHCS	Cumberland K&L, Exhibition Level
4:30pm-5:30pm	Hospitality Suite in lieu of Happy Hour Hosted by Greater Houston Regional Group	Presidential Suite, To Be Determined
6:30pm-9:00pm	BVA Gala	Cumberland FGH, Exhibition Level
Wednesday, July 9	Agenda	Room
8:00am-9:15am	Ambassador Breakfast Sponsored by OrCam (Active Ambassadors ONLY)	Cumberland FGH, Exhibition Level
9:00am-1:00pm	Exhibit Hall Hours	Landmark Ballroom, Lobby Level
9:30am-11:00am	Cooking Seminar The Blind Kitchen & WayAround Deb Erickson, Executive Chef & Founder Neva Fairchild, WayAround	Cumberland K&L, Exhibition Level
12:30pm-2:15pm	Father Carroll Luncheon & Awards Ceremony	Cumberland FGH, Exhibition Level
2:00pm	Vote Now Elections & Bylaws Close (3:00pm Eastern)	Not Applicable
2:30pm-4:30pm	Meet the Board of Directors & Executive Director	Cumberland K&L, Exhibition Level
6:30pm-9:30pm	Hospitality Suite Hosted by Greater Houston Regional Group	Presidential Suite, To Be Determined

Thursday, July 10	Agenda	Room
8:30am-9:30am	BVA Buds – Let Your Garden Grow Monique Statham, Gardening Group Facilitator	Cumberland FGH, Exhibition Level
10:00am-11:30am	Training for Regional Groups and Vice Presidents, Secretary and Treasurers, with Board of Directors	Gaston A, Atrium Level Gaston B, Atrium Level
11:45am-3:45pm	Offsite Trip – AT&T Stadium VIP Tour Home of America’s Team/Dallas Cowboys	Meet in Landmark D, Lobby Level
1:00pm-2:30pm	VA Health and Benefits app Tracy Ferro, National Secretary	Gaston B, Atrium Level
	BVA Auxiliary Tricky Tray Prizes Awarded	Aerial Queen, 3rd Level
3:00pm-4:15pm	Town Hall-Electronic Health Records- Oracle Health	Cumberland FGH Exhibition Level
6:30pm-9:30pm	Hospitality Suite in lieu of Happy Hour Hosted by Greater Houston Regional Group	Presidential Suite, To Be Determined
Friday, July 11	Agenda	Room
9:00am-11:30am	Closing Business Meeting (Announcement and swearing in of elected officers, results of Bylaw elections, new business, and closing remarks)	Cumberland K&L, Exhibition Level
12:00pm-2:00pm	Tai Chi/Qigong Session- Weibin Yang, MD, MS, MBA Chief, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Service VA North Texas Health Care System	Gaston A, Atrium Level
4:00pm-8:00pm	Offsite Trip-Circle R Ranch-Texas BBQ	Meet in Landmark D, Lobby Level

Did You Know?

- Richard G. “Dick” Fazakerley, BVA’s 30th National President from 1995-97, retired from the U.S. Army in 1981 at the rank of Major General. He was elected National President at the completion of BVA’s milestone 50th National Convention in Washington, DC. His first **President’s Page** in the September 1995 **BVA Bulletin** recapped the six-day event: “It was a great experience for all attendees from start to finish. It was a time for reviving memories of the Blinded Veterans Association’s humble beginnings and its spirited and sound objectives for the future. Highlights of the convention focused on BVA history, traditions, and the service of our founders. Presentations at the Convention’s opening ceremonies by Russ Williams and Warren Bledsoe set the tone, as did the awarding of specially minted BVA medallions to founding fathers or members of the families of those who have already passed on. It was a great sight—they were proud, and we were inspired by the occasion. I think the challenge for us as we pass our 50th anniversary is to lead the way and carry on with the same courage and spirit we saw in those that preceded us.”

Recreational and Instructional Convention Activities

Three offsite activities and one onsite conducted at the hotel are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Attendance is limited.

OFFSITE

Date: Monday, July 7, 2025 • **Time:** 12:15-4:00pm

Price: \$25 per person

The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza Curated-led Tour: The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza chronicles the assassination and legacy of President John F. Kennedy. Experience a private presentation led by Curator, Stephen Fagin, in the Museum's auditorium, formerly the seat of county government, followed by a screening of an oral history clip compilation. In addition, attendees will enjoy an overview of the early 1960s, the corner window, and the subsequent investigations, including the area where the rifle was found.

ONSITE

Date: Wednesday, July 9, 2025 • **Time:** 9:30-11:00am

Price: \$10 per person. Each participant will receive a \$25 gift card to The Blind Kitchen

Cooking Seminar: Learn cooking tips and tricks from Debra Erickson, the Executive Chef and Founder of The Blind Kitchen. In addition, discover labeling techniques with WayAround tags from Neva Fairchild, Director of Business. Sight loss should not be a barrier to cooking, regardless of your position on the blindness spectrum. Everyone has a place at the table in The Blind Kitchen!

OFFSITE

Date: Thursday, July 10, 2025 • **Time:** 11:45-3:45pm

Price: \$25 per person

AT&T Stadium VIP Tour-Home of America's Team, the Dallas Cowboys

Participants will be treated to a VIP Guided Tour offering a comprehensive view of the Stadium. Tour includes behind-the-scenes to off limits locations like the Cowboys & Cheerleaders Locker Rooms, Post-Game Interview Room, Media Press Box, Cotton Bowl Headquarters, Luxury Suite, the Cowboys Field and more! Enjoy a 3-course meal, 1 drink ticket, and a complimentary professional photo for each group member.

OFFSITE

Date: Friday, July 11, 2025 • **Time:** 4:00-8:00pm

Price: \$10 per person

Circle R Ranch 80th BBQ and Line Dancing

Celebrate BVA's 80 years of service to blind and low vision veterans! Pull on your boots and get ready to kick up your heels on a Wild West experience, which begins the moment you enter the Ranch. Enjoy an authentic Texas BBQ and Texas fun line dancing. Yippee ki yay!

A WONDERFUL MILESTONE BVA 80th NATIONAL CONVENTION

By Warner Murray
New York Regional Group

The New York Regional Group is on the way,
To the 80th Convention of the BVA.
The Hyatt Regency Hotel, plenty of space,
Downtown Dallas Texas, a wonderful place.
Family, caregivers, members, and friends,
This is a milestone of our yearly trend.
National Board, Headquarters and Staff,
Continued the excellence in executing this draft.
We will be there in the Texas hot sun,
The ranch barbecue send-off will be fun.
Wonderful excursions, theater, diners, and more,
Meetings, conferences, caucuses, just like before.
This is a milestone, come help celebrate,
Make your reservations now, to the longhorn state.
We will be there, my comrades and me,
enjoying the partnership with the ACB.
This is the place, they're recognizing the blind
Come my comrades, let's have a good time.



Located on the third floor, surrounded by a sundeck with lounge chairs and tables, the Hyatt Regency's outdoor splash pool is open year-round and accessible to people with disabilities. The pool is open from 7:00am-9:00pm daily.

Vernon Humphrey Appointed New National Executive Director

The BVA National Board of Directors has announced the appointment of Vernon F. Humphrey, PhD, as the Association's 17th National Executive Director. Vernon's new assignment is effective immediately.

Vernon became active in BVA after enrolling in the Ambassador training course. During the intensive training in 2021, he learned more about the organization, which "lit a fire in him" to participate at a much higher level. He attended his first national convention in August 2022 in Washington, DC, and decided to never miss another one.

"The camaraderie I missed from being a soldier was here within BVA all along," he said.

Vernon resigned from teaching university courses in December 2023 and became a contractor for BVA, focusing on the Ambassador program. When additional duties came along, he accepted them. He began working full-time at BVA in May of 2024 as the National Program Coordinator and has never looked back.

Born in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1960 as an Army Brat, Vernon traveled with his father's career. As he grew, he said, his hero was his dad and he wished to become like him, a retired Command Sergeant Major.

Vernon's original plans were to attend college after high school graduation at age 16. He wanted to study Civil Engineering and then do survey work for a living. His plans were soon altered slightly when he enlisted in the Army with a delayed entry in September 1978 as a Biomedical Equipment Repair Technician.



Adorned in their new BVA ties, newly appointed Executive Director Vernon Humphrey, right, and Paul Mimms surround BVA wreath at Arlington National Cemetery on Veterans Day 2024.

Vernon began his career in Pasadena, Texas, on June 12, 1979, with ten weeks of Basic Training occurring at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, followed by an assignment as a Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) 35G Geospatial Intelligence Imagery Analyst at Fitzsimons Army Medical Center (FAMC) in Denver, Colorado. Then came assignments at Eisenhower Army Medical Center at then Fort Gordon, Georgia, and as an Advanced Biomedical Equipment Repair Technician at the 97th General Hospital in Frankfurt, Germany. This was followed by six years of teaching Advanced Individual Training at FAMC.

Vernon served at the 34th General Hospital in Augsburg, Germany, as the Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge (NCOIC/

Acting Chief of Medical Maintenance) during Desert Storm. He was one of five not deployed to augment field hospitals during Operation Desert Storm and was licensed to drive all vehicles in the motor pool, including buses, and was a certified instructor for all.

“For considerable time, I was legally blind and didn’t know it,” he said. “When I was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa and became legally blind in 1992 with a 10-degree visual field, the doctor told me I was blind and I responded that I thought blindness was total darkness, proving how limited my knowledge was about blindness!”

At the 2nd General Hospital in Landstuhl, Germany (deployed as Senior Maintenance advisor to Operation PROVIDE HOPE II to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan), Vernon served on a humanitarian aid mission that managed the transportation of \$13 million worth of medical equipment. He was also in charge of the distribution, installation, and training associated with the equipment. Additionally, he coordinated humanitarian missions to Moscow, Russia; Alma Ata, Kazakhstan; and to Tbilisi, Georgia as the NCOIC and Acting Chief of Medical Maintenance and Medical Equipment Advisor for the 7th U.S. Army Medical Command.

During his final assignment as the NCOIC/ Acting Chief of Medical Maintenance at Martin Army Community Hospital in Fort Benning, Georgia, he was medically retired as a Master Sergeant (E-8) on January 17, 1999.

Vernon’s awards and decorations consist of the Legion of Merit Meritorious Service Medal; the Army Commendation Medal 1OLC; the Army Achievement Medal 1OLC; Good Conduct Medal 5 Knots; National Defense Service Medal; Humanitarian

Aid Service Medal; Non-Commissioned Professional Development, Ribbon 3; Army Service Ribbon; Overseas Service Ribbon 2; Das Abzeichen fuer Leistungen im Truppendienst (German Military Proficiency Badge Gold), and the Army Superior Unit Award.

Vernon joined BVA as a member in 1999 shortly after his medical retirement. Although he had never heard of the organization, a BVA National Service Officer at the time took on his case and got him 100 percent service connected instead of the 30 percent he had been offered for depression. His BVA membership coincided with the help he had received.

Because of his vision problems and medical retirement, he had an advantage most do not, that of spending a few years watching his children grow.

“VA offered to send me back to school to ‘become a productive member of society’ and, after a battery of tests, I chose secondary school math,” he said. “I actually wanted to teach science, but a friend told me blind guys and Bunsen burners don’t go together well!”

After taking a course in public speaking, Vernon changed his major to Communication, graduating from Georgia’s Columbus State University (CSU) in 2005 with a Bachelor of Arts. He realized at that point that he loved learning and decided to enroll in a Master’s Program in counseling at CSU. However, he soon realized, after many years of being a Non-Commissioned Officer and a father, that counseling was not the right choice. Not wanting to stop learning, however, he enrolled in the University of Southern Mississippi and began a PhD program in Communication with a focus on Interpersonal and Intercultural

Communication. For his dissertation he researched how couples change their communication patterns when one of them becomes blind.

Brenda, Vernon's wife of 42 years, and he returned to Columbus, Georgia, to be near their three children and grandchildren as he completed his PhD and taught as an adjunct professor at CSU, Georgia Military College, and Chattahoochee Valley Community College. During the same period, he published ten papers and made presentations at international, national, and state conferences. He was also the Chief Financial Officer of the American Communication Association and an inspector for the university's Communication Department accreditation compliance office.

Vernon also began serving as the Chair of the Board of Directors of a local nonprofit organization, the Disability Service Center, in 2013, where he became active in advocacy for people with disabilities. He joined the

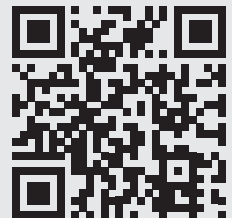
National Federation of the Blind in 2013, where he met people to interview for his dissertation. He joined Rotary International in 2014 and further grew to "understand service before self."

Vernon offered the following about his recent interpersonal relationships at BVA and the upcoming opportunity to serve as Executive Director:

"I am honored to be selected as the next National Executive Director of BVA. Don Overton has been an exceptional leader and mentor, and he is leaving big shoes to fill. I know from observation and history that leaders cannot lead alone. I look forward to gaining insight and wisdom from the staff, Board of Directors, and membership, without whom there would be no BVA. Although I am legally blind, I have sight through the voices of our membership. Together we will grow and improve the greatest blind veteran organization in the world."

Additional Accessibility Options for Reading The Bulletin

Readers of the last few issues may have noticed the absence of the Voiceye codes in the top right corner of each page. With the codes no longer available to BVA, the QR code at right will take readers directly to **The Bulletin** page on the BVA website, where current and past issues are accessible in PDF, Word, and audio format.



BVA's Link to Jimmy Carter Administration

by Stuart Nelson

With the passing of President Jimmy Carter on December 29, 2024, BVA looks back to a connection the Association had to the 39th President 46 years ago.

Past National President Dennis R. Wyant, Ed.D., also a past BVA National Field Service Director and today a member of the Florida Regional Group, was appointed and confirmed by the Senate as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans Employment after numerous important responsibilities leading up to the appointed position, including Assistant to Administrator of Veterans Affairs Max Cleland more than a decade before VA was a cabinet-level department.

Dennis was sworn into office on March 26, 1979, at a special ceremony sponsored by BVA and other leading Veterans Service Organizations at the time. The **BVA Bulletin** of January-February-March 1979 reported attendance of more than 300 persons at the ceremony.

Dennis grew up in Southern Missouri and received a Bachelor of Science degree from Southwest Missouri State. While undergoing flight training in the Navy during the 1960s, he experienced an unexplained loss of sight in one eye. Although the sudden turn of events ended his career as a naval aviator, Dennis demonstrated the drive of many BVA members, launching a new career as a computer salesperson for the National Cash Register Company.



BVA member Dennis Wyant was Deputy Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans Employment during the second half of the Carter Administration.

After losing his sight in the second eye, Dennis earned an MBA from Wright State University and a doctorate in Adult and Vocational Education from the University of Cincinnati. The latter degree was bestowed while Dennis was serving as BVA's National Field Service Director from 1973-75. The title of his doctoral dissertation was "The Job Search for the Severely Visually Impaired and Totally Blinded Veterans of the Vietnam Era."

In addition to his election as BVA National President, he served as National Vice President, National Secretary, and president of the then Maryland-DC-Virginia Regional Group. He is also a published author on articles relating to the employment of the disabled.

Around BVA

Paul Mimms Visits Capitol Hill, Presents BVA Legislative Priorities

BVA National President Paul Mimms summarized the Association's legislative priorities for Fiscal Year 2025 in testimony before a joint session of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs on February 25. Chronicling for the Committees a day in the life of a blinded veteran in keeping an appointment at a VA health facility, and using himself as the example, Paul outlined several ways in which America's blind and low vision veterans continue to be underserved and disenfranchised.



Paul Mimms sets for delivery of BVA testimony during February 25 Capitol Hill VSO hearing.



Administrative Coordinator Michaeun Harrison, Paul Mimms, and guide dog Shadow outside BVA National Headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, moments prior to departing for Congressional testimony in Cannon House Office Building.

View Paul's full testimony presented in panel format at <https://veterans.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=6645> and/or read the full written testimony submitted for the Congressional Record at <https://BVA.org/services/advocacy>. His oral presentation begins at 2:10:40 on the video recording. The question-and-answer period of which Paul is a participant begins at 2:34:46.

In Brussels, Overton Demonstrates BVA's Emerging Global Reach

On February 4, Meta's European Union Innovation Day 2025 brought together policymakers, technology leaders, and businesses for a series of panel discussions and product demonstrations in Brussels, Belgium. Don Overton represented BVA and the disability community on several levels internationally.

Don was part of a panel discussion entitled "Right to Access: Shaping Policies to Unlock Assistive Technology in Europe," where he addressed the potential of Artificial Intelligence for people with disabilities and the importance of access to assistive devices and specific technologies originating from the principles of basic human rights.

The panel also discussed the ethical and legal challenges faced by assistive technology developers when introducing products to the markets, including affordability, data availability, and the privacy of both users and the public.

Innovation Day 2025 highlighted European small and midsize enterprises, startups, and creators building with open source AI. It also provided a platform for tech leaders and policymakers to exchange views on shaping Europe's digital future in 2025 and beyond. Meta, formerly the Facebook company, builds the future of human connection and the technology that makes it possible.

Watch a series of sound bites from interviews with Meta's guest participants, including one from Don, at <https://euractive.com/section/tech/video/meta-eu-innovation-day-2025>.

BVA Welcomes New Legislative Director

Lea Rowe has joined BVA as the most recent addition to the National Headquarters staff, bringing with her 20 years of experience in nonprofit management, including her recent tenure as Head of Client Services at Lighthouse for the Blind of Fort Worth, Texas. Her BVA arrival on January 27 fortuitously coincided with the composition of the written version of the annual testimony submitted to Congress in late February.

With a deep passion for serving the blind and low vision community, Lea is committed to advocating for the needs of blind and low vision veterans. She earned a Bachelor's Degree in Public Health from the University of Texas at Tyler and will graduate in June with a Master's Degree in Low Vision Therapy, at the same time receiving certification as a Low Vision Therapist.



Lea Rowe, far right, followed right to left by new BVA colleagues Wade Davis, Paul Mimms, Michaun Harrison, and Don Overton.

Lonnie Bedwell Climbs Mount Vinson, Arrives at South Pole after 70 Miles on Skis

BVA member and extreme adventure athlete Lonnie Bedwell has conquered still more superhuman, near-impossible feats in his quest, among other things, to climb the highest peaks on all seven of the world's continents.



Proving over and over that the seemingly impossible is never out of reach, Lonnie Bedwell marks arrival at the South Pole last December 15.

Flying onto the ice-covered continent of Antarctica on November 27 from Punta Arenas, Chile, he and his Sightless Summits companion, Bryan Hill, headed to the Ellsworth Mountains to climb Mount Vinson, the continent's highest peak. That climb occurred December 3.

After additional preparations and conditioning, they flew on December 9 to the last latitude degree in the world. They disembarked on the polar plateau nearly 70 miles from the actual South Pole and set off skiing while pulling a heavy sled. The expedition would take six days as they reached their South Pole destination on

December 15. Lonnie flew home from South America in time for the holidays, arriving in Dugger, Indiana, on December 22!

Digital BVA Membership Card Offers Improved Accessibility, Other Benefits

By Teresa Galgano

BVA National Headquarters is pleased to remind you about the availability of the Association's digital membership card, which has been available for you to download to your smartphones for the past few months. This digital card is part of ongoing efforts to enhance your membership experience by providing convenient and immediate access to your membership details.

The digital membership card offers numerous benefits over traditional physical cards. It is always accessible on your smartphone, ensuring that you have your membership information readily available whenever you need it. This digital format is not only environmentally friendly but also eliminates the worry of losing or damaging your card.

If you haven't yet downloaded your digital membership card, you can do so easily using your smartphone. Please note that this process must be completed on a smartphone and not on a computer. It will work with both an iPhone and an Android. The following information will be helpful in accessing your card.

1. Email instructions: Check your inbox for an email from **Alerts@MuseumAnywhere.com**. This email contains detailed instructions on how to download your digital membership card. Simply follow the steps provided to add the card to your iPhone.

2. QR Code Access: Alternatively, you can visit BVA's Membership webpage, **bva.org/membership**. Once there, use your smartphone to scan the QR code displayed on the page. This will guide you through the process of downloading your digital card.

3. Direct link from website: Using your smartphone, open BVA's webpage and follow the instructions for downloading from the website.

We encourage all BVA members to take advantage of this convenient digital option. The digital membership card is a testament to BVA's commitment to utilizing technology to better serve our community of blind and low vision veterans.

If you have any questions or need assistance with downloading your card, please do not hesitate to reach out to our support team at **membership@bva.org** or 202-371-8880, Ext. 330.

An Unthinkable Snow Day

January 21, 2025, will forever be known as an official Snow Day in Southern Mississippi after a record-breaking winter storm dumped seven inches of snow along the Gulf Coast from Texas to Florida. The icy road conditions and snow accumulation resulted in a three-day shutdown of the VA Gulf Coast BRC in Biloxi, Mississippi.

Several BVA members rode out the "once-in-blue-moon storm" with nurses and staff who were identified as part of the emergency ride-out crew normally implemented for hurricanes, not snowstorms! BVA members were able to complete an Orientation and Mobility lesson in the snow, in addition to applying to real life the knowledge and training gained from their Living Supervised class. Directed by BRC Chief Debra Gilley,



Left to right alongside BRC sign marker: Louisiana/Mississippi Regional Group members Roger Coleman and Gerald Newman, blinded veteran Tommy Prehoda, and Director of District 1 John O'Connell.

the veterans even cooked up a hot breakfast for themselves and BRC staff!

LA/MS Cooks Off Again, Presents Braille Flag

On February 8, members of the BVA Louisiana/Mississippi (LA/MS) Regional Group gathered at Blind Grace, a nonprofit organization that holds summer camps for visually impaired children in Lafayette, Louisiana. The occasion was the organization's third annual Gumbo-Jambalaya-Pastalaya Cook-off.

The event was originally scheduled for January 25, but due to the rare winter blizzard in southern Louisiana reported above and in **BVA Happenings** (10 inches of snow and temperatures down to 4 degrees), it was postponed until February 8 when the skies were clear and temperatures reached 80 degrees.

For the second year in a row, members of LA/MS BVA Regional Group entered teams in the cook-off. There were four teams that included LA/MS members: BVA member Francis Arceneaux, his wife Lynette, daughter Linda, and her husband; BVA member Gary Schoelerman, his wife Marelle, and Holly Huval with the Breaux Bridge Lions Club; BVA member James Yaeger, his wife Tammy, his brother-in-law Jason Lopez, and the latter's wife Tonia, who together are professional cook-off contestants traveling throughout the state competing in various events; and LA/MS Secretary Shawntina Gibson, her friend who is a professional chef at one of Lafayette's popular restaurants, and many friends from the Lafayette Lions Club.



Gary Schoelerman and Holly Huval, Breaux Bridge Lions Club, at cook-off's BVA Information table.

Schoelerman. "The teams all thought they had finished fourth, and James thought he had won the People's Choice, mainly because he bribed more people than Shawntina, but they lost out to an exotic Jambalaya with squirrel meat and pineapple!"

According to Gary, despite not placing in the top four this year, the contestants had a great time and vowed to be back next year to win. The LA/MS banners, the Bronze and Acrylic Braille Flags, and BVA brochures attracted many of the visitors and other contestants.

"Everyone was fascinated by the Braille Flags, but the question asked most was how blind people cook Gumbo over an open flame," said Gary. "Of course, we answered that it is done very carefully."

During the awards ceremony, BVA members presented an acrylic flag and plaque to the Affiliated Blind of Louisiana (ABL), a residential blind rehabilitation center located in Lafayette. Directors Chavonne and Lynn Blanchard were there to accept the flag. Many of the LA/MS Regional Group members are alumni of ABL. The flag was sponsored by



Left to right prior to competition, BVA member James Yaeger and his wife, Tammy, joined by James' brother-in-law Jason Lopez and his wife, Tonia.

"In 2024, the LA/MS teams took first and third place, but unfortunately this year the same teams were shut out, even though some brought in professional ringers," said Gary


the Breaux Bridge Lions Club, the Vietnam Veterans of America Lafayette Chapter 162, and the BVA regional group.

“One of the cook-off visitors came by with his daughter and wanted to meet the veterans with sight loss because he is a Vietnam veteran and losing his sight,” said Gary. “He was given the number of the BROS (Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialist) and will join BVA as soon as he can!”

Gardening Group Enjoys Successful Spring Run

The spring series of the Gardening Interest Group facilitated by Monique Statham reached full bloom in late April and early May. The virtual Monday evening sessions, open to all blind and visually impaired veterans, began April 14 and continued until May 12.

The focus of the hour-long sessions was planting seeds, preparing the gardening areas in the ground and in containers, and the growing and harvesting process.



BLINDED VETERANS ASSOCIATION
SERVING BLINDED VETERANS SINCE WORLD WAR II

GARDENING INTEREST GROUP

5- WEEK SPRING SERIES

Facilitated by
Monique Statham

Monday
April 14–May 12, 2025

6:00pm–7:30pm
Eastern Time

Recent VA Whole Health research supports the value of gardening in improving sleep, creating social connections, and elevating one’s spirit!

Did You Know?

- On August 6, 1955, at the BVA 10th National Convention in New York City, the Association unanimously passed a resolution condemning a growing movement to set aside portions of public gardens as special “fragrance gardens for the blind.” The resolution came in reaction to a forceful reaction from National Chaplain Thomas J. Carroll in his annual address to the BVA membership. Among other things, Father Carroll said that “the picture (admittedly my own) of the group of the blind leaving the busy, hard-smelling world of their fellows to go off and bask in the tropically heavy perfume of their own scented Nirvana is a little more than I can take!” The resolution echoed the National Chaplain’s sentiments by stating that the promotion of so-called “fragrance gardens for the blind” is inextricably involved with a false and cloying sentimentality, whose publicity implements the false notion of many that blind persons live in some nebulous world different from their own and that such emotional miseducation can set back many years the movement to integrate blind persons into sighted society.



Auxiliary's View

By Debbie Frick

Hello again from the BVA Auxiliary reporter. It's hard to believe the old year is gone and a new year is here. Equally difficult to believe is

that almost a year has passed since our last national convention and another one is now upon us. I never thought I was an anxious young adult, but it seems I have become used to being a semi-anxious old person. Things continue to "roll" for me, and I hope they are rolling for you too.

The Auxiliary Scholarship Committee has opened up the Renee Feldman Scholarship program. BVAA awards three scholarships per academic year; two for \$2,000 and one for \$1,500 made in two installments (fall/spring). Applicants must be a spouse or a generational child (child, grandchild, great-grandchild) of a blinded veteran who is or has been a BVA member.

The BVAA scholarship is open to full-time students in an accredited vocational and/or technical school, community college, college, or university. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that the required transcripts, documents, 300-word essay, and letters of reference reach the committee chairperson by May 1 of each year. At press time of **The Bulletin**, the deadline had already passed for this year but please keep that date at the forefront of your memory for future years. You can access the information on the BVA website in the BVAA section.

Our Town Hall meetings continue to provide members with up-to-date information and help keep us connected to each other.

Our January meeting noted a VA Caregiver support program that can be a valuable resource for the veteran and caregiver. Karen Knappenberger provided an overall view of the nationwide programs. Their mission is to promote the health and well-being of family caregivers through education, resources, support, and services. You can access this program at caregiver.va.gov. Aspects of the program include peer support, mentoring, skills training, coaching, phone support, online programs, and referral to resources.

The FIRST program (Finding Important Resources, Support, and Training) focuses on building better caregivers organizations. There is a learning library and an automated text message service to assist families in keeping connection with their care plans. Ms. Knappenberger's advice is to reach out to the VA facility team and have your provider put in for a consultation.

Another Town Hall meeting included three panelists: Casey Ebert, owner of Mason Wells Day Spa and Massage Therapy; Chip Newman from Midwest Battle Buddies (service dogs); and Valerie Bledsoe, who is a Master Herbalist. All provided amazing information from their respective fields.

I started writing this article back on January 20, Inauguration and Martin Luther King Day. I may not be super informed on politics, nor do I always have opinions similar to those of my friends and family. I do, however, embrace the choices I have regarding my responses to news, and my political and religious differences with others. I try to keep an open mind and try to accept others' points of views. May we all find joy in this wonderful country of ours.



Veterans Service Program Update

by Duayne Driscoll

What is a Clear and Unmistakable Error?

Many of the claims submitted by the VSP go very smoothly because

we employ a strategy of presenting fully developed claims with supporting evidence whenever possible. However, the decision makers at VA still get it wrong sometimes, especially when it comes to Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) and ancillary benefits entitlement related to vision loss.

A Clear and Unmistakable Error (CUE) exists when the Agency of Original Jurisdiction (AOJ) commits an error of fact or law in the rating decision. An “error of fact” means the decision maker failed to consider all the evidence of record. For example, when service connection is denied for lack of treatment in service, we look in the Service Treatment Records and find all kinds of complaints and treatment for the issue while serving on active duty. The AOJ did not get the facts right in this scenario, causing an erroneous decision.

In vision loss claims, errors of law are much more common. An “error of law” means the decision maker failed to properly apply the laws and regulations surrounding disability compensation claims. For example, six different levels of SMC may be assigned due to blindness, depending upon the level of vision loss: K, L, L1/2, M, M1/2, and N. With additional service connection for

hearing or extremity loss, the SMC increases substantially. Comorbid but separate disabilities rated 50 or 100 percent can also increase the SMC further. Amazingly, even seasoned decision makers at VA have a hard time getting this right.

When a rating error happens, we have several options, depending on how long ago the error occurred. If fewer than 30 days, we can request a Claims Accuracy Review, or CAR. This is the very best time to catch an error because the AOJ usually addresses these requests in a timely fashion.

When the error is more than 30 days old, but less than one year, we request Higher Level Review (HLR), which is the first step toward an appeal if we cannot get the issue resolved at the local level. Our request for HLR based on CUE goes into the queue with all of the other requests for review that are not related to rating errors. We generally expect a good outcome with an HLR based on CUE because the regulations are undeniable and it’s easy to show entitlement when it exists under the law, but it may take a little longer than a CAR.

What if the error is greater than one year old? Rating decisions become final after one year if not disputed. However, the law allows for correction of historical rating errors. In these cases, we must request revision, and there is no time limit.

VA has a long history of SMC rating errors. Please contact the VSP for a file review to ensure that your vision loss is rated correctly.



Ways to Give New and Old

by Meredith Buono-DaGrossa

Development strategies are always a priority throughout the year, and even more so as BVA commemorates 80 years of service this year. Our mission of providing these services and benefits to blind and low vision veterans, their families, and caregivers remains at the forefront.

Critical priorities are revenue generation, stewardship of donors and stakeholders, and building awareness. Strong focus on donation strategies, corporate partnership engagement, and new initiatives are critical to the future of BVA. I thought I would share a few examples of these focuses with you.

Monthly Givers (BVA Visionaries)

BVA Visionaries are an exceptional group of engaged donors who contribute monthly to BVA. These recurring gifts allow for a continuous stream of revenue and more engaged donors. A star-tiered system has been implemented to engage and recognize monthly givers. In March, lapel pins were provided to BVA Visionaries to recognize their commitment to our blind and low vision veterans.

Corporate Partnerships

Our Corporate Partnership program with year-round benefits has been successful in the acquisition and retention of corporate partners and sponsors. This system has allowed more annual engagement and relationship building with our partners.

FreeWill Planned/Smart Giving

In December, BVA partnered with FreeWill, an accessible and user-friendly platform with charitable giving software, a customized portal, and a dedicated partner service team committed to planned and smart giving success. The platform will allow BVA to raise more impactful gifts such as bequests, DAFs (Donor-Advised Funds), stocks, crypto, and IRAs. Microsites are now live on **BVA.org** and provide educational tools and resources for special donors who include BVA in their legacy giving.

BVA Store

A new BVA store launched earlier this year with Will Enterprises has been historically successful. Will Enterprises offers the site, a graphic artist, bulk pricing, and a wider variety of merchandise for shoppers at competitive prices. The Store has increased sales, awareness, and it has generated a new source of revenue.

National Convention

As we “giddy up” and get ready for the 80th BVA National Convention at the Hyatt Regency in Dallas, Texas, the excitement and camaraderie continues to build. The Convention Committee has been hard at work planning a world-class exhibit hall with emerging technologies, whole health activities, memorable offsite trips, an 80th Texas BBQ, a hospitality suite hosted by the Greater Houston Regional Group, business meetings, and the “popular” Bow Wow Lounge sponsored by our friends at Waymo.

Convention has always been an unforgettable gathering of BVA families, friends, and caregivers, and this year promises to be the best yet! I encourage those that have attended in the past to join us again from July 5-11, 2025. For those who are attending for

the first time, welcome to the family. Special thanks to our Judge Advocate, Stephen Butler, for writing the lyrics and music for our very own line dance – The **BVA Boot Shuffle**. Slip on your cowboy boots, grab your white canes, and meet us in Dallas. Yippee Ki-Yay BVA!

THE BVA BOOT SHUFFLE

By Stephen Butler, National Judge Advocate

Song Lyrics for “The BVA Boot Shuffle”

Music to be introduced at 80th National Convention

[Verse 1] (♩♩)

Tap your heel now, one and two!
Switch it left now, just like new!
Move that toe out, slide it wide
Bring it home now, side to side!

[Chorus] (♩♩)

It's the BVA Boot Shuffle, step real slow
Move to the rhythm, let's go, let's go!
Stomp your boots, one and two!
Clap your hands, that's all you do!

[Verse 2] (♩♩)

Heel and tap, now feel the beat
Toes go left, then toes go right!
Stomp two times and take it easy
Clap your hands, now smile and breathe!

[Final Chorus – Repeat & Fade Out] (♩♩)

It's the BVA Boot Shuffle, easy as can be!
Step to the music, move those feet!
Veterans dancing, having fun!
Line up, partner – we're not done!
It's the BVA Boot Shuffle, easy as can be!
Step to the music, move those feet!
Veterans dancing, having fun!
Line up, partner – we're not done!

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American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers



Wellness at 95: Your Powerful Brain and Exercise

by Paschal Baute

How can I train my brain to become sharper and live happier and healthier?

Few of us today know how our brain works, so we have no idea how it can help or hurt us, increase or decrease our wellness. Such valuable information is taught hardly anywhere anymore, even in VA mental health circles as far as I can tell.

According to our U.S. Surgeon General, we are in an epidemic both of loneliness and depression. I believe we also have an epidemic of grudge-holding. This involves the possession of hostile feelings, anger, hurt, and blaming, being unaware that we create and prolong them. Pent-up angry feelings bear directly on loneliness and depression. Indeed, it may be the actual source of much of our mistrust.

Understanding how our brain works is a huge help in dealing with this epidemic. Do we know, for example, how our brain tends first to grab the negative, regularly and universally?

What is fascinating is that we can strengthen the left part of our observing brain to be less reactive, less negative, and more focused while at the same time growing new brain cells. We can take better charge of our health, our moods, indeed, our determination and resilience, by regular cardiovascular exercise. The following facts are critical in helping us change!

1. Regular Cardiovascular Exercise (RCVE) strengthens and reinforces a stronger sense of self.

2. RCVE adds to our brain's gray matter—hence, better observant reasoning.
3. RCVE strengthens our ability to monitor our reactive brains, which means better control of fear and negative feelings.
4. RCVE takes full charge of our whole self, allowing us to become the captain of our own ships.
5. RCVE makes us happier, stimulating our happy hormones.
6. RCVE refreshes all the organs of our bodies to stimulate new cell growth.

From the Mayo Clinic and Harvard, and affirmed by the National Institutes of Health: “Regular physical activity can improve muscle strength and boost endurance. It sends oxygen and nutrients to the tissues and helps the cardiovascular system work more efficiently. It helps to maintain healthy blood pressure, keeps harmful plaque from building up in the arteries, reduces inflammation, improves blood sugar levels, strengthens bones, and helps stave off depression.”

In short, there is no more important “drug” for wellness and longevity than RCVE.

My Context: In the U.S. military, I had three careers (Military Occupational Specialties): Sports Manager, Chaplain, and Psychologist. Aided by an awesome wife, I have done distance running, swam, waterskied, or snow skied all my adult life, the latter of which we did in six countries and ten states over a 30-year period. We stopped only when we reached our 80s!

Beware of Job Scams Targeting Veterans, VSOs



BVA is dedicated to safeguarding the well-being of its members. Accordingly, a recent trend has created a particular concern, that of job scams targeting veterans. These scams are designed to exploit the trust and dedication of those who have served our country, and it is crucial to stay informed to protect yourself and your loved ones.

Scammers often pose as legitimate employers or recruiters, offering enticing job opportunities that seem too good to be true. They may contact you via email, phone, or social media, claiming to have found your resume online or through a veterans' job board, or they may falsely advertise on platforms, such as LinkedIn, a position that does not exist. These fraudulent offers sometimes require personal information or upfront fees for training or equipment without even an interview. Requests like these are red flags!

Additionally, be wary of scams involving checks. Some scammers may send you a check as part of a job offer, asking you to deposit it and then wire a portion of the

money back for equipment or other expenses. These checks are typically fake, and you could be held responsible for the entire amount once the bank realizes the fraud.

To protect yourself from these scams, consider the following tips:

1. **Verify the Employer.** Research the company independently. Check their official website and contact them directly using verified contact information to confirm the job offer's legitimacy.

2. **Be Wary of Upfront Fees and Checks.** Legitimate employers will not ask for money for training, equipment, or background checks. Be cautious if asked to pay any fees or if you receive a check with instructions to wire money back.

3. **Protect Personal Information.** Do not share sensitive information such as your Social Security Number or bank details until you have verified the employer's legitimacy.

4. **Trust Your Instincts.** If something feels off or too good to be true, your feelings are probably valid. Trust your instincts and proceed with caution.

If you suspect that you have encountered a job scam, report it immediately to the Federal Trade Commission at **<https://reportfraud.ftc.gov>** or contact your local VA office for assistance.

BVA is committed to supporting our blind and low vision veterans and their families in all aspects of their lives, including employment. By staying informed and vigilant, we can protect ourselves and our community from these harmful scams. Stay safe and reach out if you need support or guidance.

Revisiting the VA Auto Grant: Veterans May Be Eligible for Second Grant

BVA reported two years ago on an enhanced transportation benefit for disabled veterans. Based on a handful of recent inquiries, many new Association members, and more readers of **BVA Happenings** than ever before, the topic deserves to be revisited and reemphasized. Prior to early 2023, VA offered a one-time, single-use automobile grant to those who needed to buy a specially adapted vehicle outright, but this all changed with passage of the Advancing Uniform Transportation Opportunities for Veterans (AUTO) Act of 2023.

Prior to 2023, multiple grants were available to add special adaptive equipment but, when it came to buying an already-adapted vehicle, the offer was limited to a single grant. The most important changes that occurred with the AUTO Act of 2023 concern those who have used the grant before and the timing of the grant. Specifically, the changes are these:

Disabled veterans who have received an automobile grant in the past can receive it a second or even a third time.

Disabled veterans may apply for an automobile grant once every ten years, but there is a phase-in period for this enhanced benefit.

Disabled veterans who have used a vehicle grant before but have not done so in the past 30 years are eligible for another grant.

The wait period for receiving the second grant expires in 2032. For example, if you used the grant in 2017, you would be eligible after 15 years rather than 30.

Qualifying for the grant as a veteran with sight loss comes with decreased vision in both eyes and “20/200 vision or less in the better eye with glasses, or greater than 20/200 vision but with a visual field defect that has reduced peripheral vision to 20 degrees or less in the better eye.”

Additional information about eligibility for a vehicle grant and how to apply, including access to the appropriate forms, is available at <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/special-claims/automobile-allowance-adaptive-equipment>.

Learn the Essence of Whole Health, Develop Plans for Making It a Way of Life

Whole Health is about us as a whole person and what matters most to us, not just what is the matter with us when our health is less than perfect.

BVA members, their families, and their VA care teams can develop a plan based on their priorities for their health. These may include moving around more, sleeping better, or waking up with less pain. Explore those priorities now by viewing an overview video at <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/get-involved/get-started.asp> and looking over additional instructional materials on how to get started. Then, embark on that life-changing whole health journey!

In Remembrance

**The Blinded Veterans Association deeply regrets
the passing of the following veterans.**

Alabama R.G.

Benny Corley
Leo Fox
Jack Kinley
Daniel Kinsey
James Layman
Owen Liles
Jimmie McCary
David Nicholson
Mike Pistacchio
Charles Swan
Kathleen Wilkowske

Willie Gaskins
Elijah Grant
Clyde Guyton
William Hightower
Sylvester Holmes
Norman Hulen
Herman Jernigan
Val Kirk
Thomas Link
Jerry Mingo
Samuel Nelson
Don Pace
Rush Richardson
Percy Saunders
Billy Underwood
Jose Vazquez
Raymond Weaver

Arkansas R.G.

Donald Brey
James Edwards
Wesley Heerssen
George Holt
Billy Howell
Donald Murphy
Odis Waymack

Charles Register R.G.

Douglas George
Joseph Hynes
Ray Rivera
Arthur Stillwell
Ken Sulser

Cape Cod and Islands

Earl Caudill
Edward Sarro

Carolina R.G.

Rudolph Batts
Donald Bringenberg
Albert Clark
Harvey Cranfill
Gregory Dahlen
James Dickson
Bobby Dockham

Florida R.G.

George Adam
Edward Addison
Herbert Anderson
Lawrence Baker
Hoover Ballard
Benjamin Barnhart
John Barracato

continued

In Remembrance *continued*

Irwin Baumel
Lawrence Belland
Winfield Bennett
Arthur Bentley
William Bivins
Weldon Boggs
Jack Bolinski
Carroll Bristol
Thomas Brown
James Bryant
Henry Bucher
William Burden
James Burns
Ernest Buser
Robert Butler
Robert Caldwell
Norman Chartier
Michael Clavin
Clara Cleland
Sanuel Consiglio
Willis Cornet
Claude Cushman
Wilbur Davidson
Donald Franklin
Isaiah Haas
Sallie Hollis
Carlos Jones
Martin Kutnyak
James Lacey
Eugene Leonard
Carl Leonburger
Twyman Lineberger
Peter Lovett
Nelson Marvin
Vincent Masetta
Carmine Masi
James McCoy
Howard Petroff

Numa Pillion
Walter Pleasants
Glen Poley
Robert Rinzel
Henry River
John Suteu
Ameil Thomas
Donald Thornburg
Thomas Trout
Charlie Vann
Virginia Vogel
Mabel Wangler
John Warrant
Wilbur Webb
Dwight Whigham
William Whitaker
Reuben Williams
Charles Worthen
James Yancy
John Zuch

Forward Wisconsin R.G.

David Buchholz
Ervin Huber
Ronald Kennedy
Jerome Radtke
Frank Roe
Michael Smith
Dale Story
Carl Wallrath
Luther Williams
Alois Zullner

Georgia R.G.

Paul Halpern
Horace Hayes

continued

In Remembrance *continued*

Greater Houston R.G.

Richard Romolo

Heartland R.G.

Richard Auernheimer

Robert Beach

Ronald Challacombe

Edward Clark

Cleotha Clay

Lenvel Comstock

Patrick Conrad

Robert Darling

Melvin Ellison

James Hare

Paul Henry

Robert Howell

Burris Jones

Myron Laramore

Arland Lester

Dwight McCarty

John McGuigan

Donald Merrick

Earl Rogers

Gerald Ross

Milton Sharp

John Smith

Harold Stanton

Oscar Stevenson

Illinois R.G.

Eugene Baltes

William Kretz

John Marsala

Louis Paries

Vito Petruzzelli

Arthur Schutz

Louisiana/Mississippi R.G.

Thomas Hatton

Samuel Kirsch

Eric Rogers

Carl Tudor

Michigan R.G.

George Buriak

John Bushaw

Russell Cusumano

George Haley

Arnold Kjosness

Theodore McClintock

Raymond Parzych

Harold Schlipp

Midwest North R.G.

William Chuchna

Wanda Kveen

Jack Lavold

Lillian Lowry

James Lyman

Jerome Lyman

Leonard Matthys

Lloyd Miller

Bill Moeller

Henry Prottengeier

Floyd Randall

Jerry Ratcliff

Thomas Swedzinski

continued

In Remembrance *continued*

New Jersey R.G.

Juan Ayala
Nathaniel Gatlin
Stephen Liszewski
Hyman Silverstein
Timrod Stephens
Eugene Toback
Herman Weiss
Kenneth Wolstenholme

New York R.G.

Francis Alix
Vincent Argiro
Frank Bianco
John Boyd
William Fugagli
Ernest Hylton
Gasper Ingrassia

Ohio R.G.

Michael Bocskey
Donald Raies
John Senger
Harrison Weems
Peter Zimmer

Oklahoma R.G.

George Bicknell
Michael Braswell
Richard Cain
James Chandler
Marlin Hennig
Michael Johnson
James Lasiter
Gerald Madsen
Jimmie Rogers

Pennsylvania R.G.

Kent Anderson
Robert Bailey
William Ballard
John Bruhn
Charles Buzon
Santo Calcagnetti
Albert Cataldo
Donald Davis
John Duink
Joseph Elliott
George Evancho
James Flagg
Girard Genevie
Robert Getschman
Eugene Good
John Gregory
John Hale
Jack Henry
Ralph Hoover
Burton Johnson
George Johnson
Joseph Jordan
Irvin Keithley
Elwood Kissner
Walter Kosa
David Krause
James Lenhart
Donald Manning
Francis Marinko
Laurence Meley
Walter Morgan
Alan Morrison
Gordon Myers
J. Mylin
William Nobles

continued

In Remembrance *continued*

Richard Pearsall
Michael Reyda
Herbert Rose
Richard Shell
David Sprenkle
Gary Tilman
William Weiler
James Yaconis
John Yurkovich

Puerto Rico R.G.

David Mojica Negron
Victor Roque Vicens

RI and S.E. Mass R.G.

Placido Femino
Sumner Morse
Anthony Pallotta
Anthony Ricci

Rocky Mountain R.G.

Loren Ludwig

Southern California R.G.

Harold Goldfarb
Colin Jones
Ralph Pelle

South Texas R.G.

Eleazar Davila
William Lehman

Washington R.G.

Alvin Bradley
Richard Hausmann

At-Large BVA Members, No Regional Group Affiliation

William Alt
Brent Baldree
Norberto Ballon
Charles Beasley
Harold Blair
Raymond Bodeur
Camille Boyer
Tony Cardoza
Roland Castonguay
Rafael Diaz
Dan Duffer
William Getson-Danner
Jim Keller
Ramona Livernois
Albert Luedtke
Michael Pavelich
Virgil Reading
Joseph Ribeiro
Steve Sees
Louis Sheridan

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Final Thought

BVA Convention Volunteer Coordinator Margarine Beaman first became involved with ACB national conventions in 1982, posting Braille and large-print numbers on each floor. She also placed Braille letters on vending machines, guest room doors, restaurant menus, and in restrooms.

In the late 1980s, BVA National Treasurer at the time and active ACB member Carl Foley went to his fellow BVA Board members with a petition: "BVA needs this lady!" So, in 1990 Margarine began at the 45th National Convention at the Kennedy Plaza Hotel in Providence, Rhode Island, what is now a run of 35 consecutive years of dedicated assistance to blinded veterans and their families!

Pictured here with Freddie Edwards (Indiana Regional Group and then Director of District 2) near the White House in 2010, Margarine has remained with BVA through thick and thin. Her voice will be the first many BVA members hear in early July as she coordinates volunteer efforts with both the veterans of BVA and attendees of the ACB national convention.

